

Adam S. Burrows – Superintendent of Schools
Voluntown, Connecticut 06384
aburrows@voluntownct.org
February 26, 2018

Dear Members of the Education Committee
Connecticut State Legislature – Room 3100 of the LOB

As the Superintendent of the Voluntown Public Schools I urge legislators to approve H.B. No. 5171 prohibiting the Governor from making rescissions to a town's education cost sharing grant during the fiscal year. There have been too many changes in the exact allocations of ECS funds over this past year. These uncertainties have required significant budgetary adjustments because Voluntown received a significant and drastic loss in state ECS funding.

The Voluntown Board of Education presented a 2017-18 budget at the June 2017 Town Meeting for a total of \$6,905,174 and this represented a 1.59% or \$108,118 increase over the 2016-17 budget of \$6,797,057. The Town, at the requests of the Boards of Education and Selectmen did not approve the budgets because the State of Connecticut needed more time to approve the final allocations or distribution of available ECS or Educational Costs Sharing funds to municipalities. Voluntown maintained a temporary budget with a 0% increase.

Our school system was proactive during these first several months of the school year. We implemented several cost-saving measures, essential spending strategies, and delayed budgetary decisions until the passage of a not only a state budget by the legislature but also a verification of the actual allocation of ECS funds based on “holdbacks” by the Governor.

There was a \$1,001,048 cut in our 2017-2018 ECS grant that was imposed by the Governor in July 2017. This 2017-2018 cut in the ECS grant for Voluntown was then set at \$125,131 by the Connecticut legislators in November. A few weeks later in mid-November, the Governor imposed “holdbacks” which severely reduced our 2017-2018 ECS allocation and we received \$2,174,691 rather than the \$2,502,621 from the previous year. This “holdback” was \$327,930.

We had many financial challenges during these long months of uncertainty about how much financial support we would receive from the State of Connecticut. The Board of Education continued with our existing faculty levels to maintain programs to meet the needs of the students currently enrolled in our school system. We made transfers from other accounts, delayed security

upgrades, held back on maintenance, reprioritized long-term projects, and delayed the actual hiring of non-certified staff until we had an approved budget.

The Board of Education held a Special Meeting on November 30, 2017 to review the severe cuts in state aid and approved an “adjusted” 2017-18 budget for a total of \$6,785,654. This represented a minus 0.17% or \$11,405 decrease as compared to the 2016-17 budget of \$6,797,057. A special Town Meeting was held on December 20, 2017 and the Board of Education proposed budget of \$6,785,654 was approved. This required a significant increase in the local property taxes.

I again urge legislators to approve H.B. No. 5171 prohibiting the Governor from making rescissions to a town's education cost sharing grant during the fiscal year. Voluntown is now in the process of developing the 2018-2019 budget proposal and we are listed as receiving an additional \$98, 897 cut in the ECS grants. The Board of Education has already approved the elimination one certified teaching position in 2018-2019. We are also in the process of reviewing reductions in other positions. Any unanticipated rescissions in this current year will have a negative impact in plans for maintaining consistent educational experiences and programs in the future for our students.

The Voluntown Board of Education would benefit from the approval of H.B. No. 5167 to allow each town to deposit into a non-lapsing account any unexpended funds not to exceed 2% from the prior fiscal year from the budgeted appropriations for education.

And, based in my prior experiences with testifying I want to include a brief statement about the effective cost saving approaches utilized by small school systems. Voluntown utilizes regional approaches with curriculum development, professional development, and assessments services through EASTCONN and the RESCs. We are members of the CT Partnership for health insurance. We have CIRMA for other insurances. We have our own lease-purchased buses (now two years old), maintain drivers with excellent credentials, and we have reduced the transportation costs from previous years (\$470,013 in 2007-2008 and \$419,011 in 2017-2018) for basically the same number of students. All three and four year-olds in Voluntown attend our excellent School Readiness pre-school program. Our eighth graders have a choice of seven different high school and we provide transportation and pay tuition. There is an ability of a smaller school system to quickly make cost-saving decisions while maintaining excellent academic performance.